MANITOBA ADDICTIONS AWARENESS WEEK

Topic: **Kids at Risk Fact Sheet**

Audience: Parents and Caregivers

Kids at Risk Fact Sheet

Addiction is a family issue

Many family members and friends watch the addicted person in the downward tailspin of the addiction and recognize how much the person needs help. What many do not realize is that they – especially kids – are also affected by the addiction.

Children of addicted parents: don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel

As a result of the stressful conditions under which they grow and develop, children are at higher risk for:

- Developing one or more addictions
- Developing eating disorders
- Entering into unhealthy relationships
- Or a host of other self-defeating behaviours

In addition, they are subject to possible genetic inheritance of addiction.

In order to adapt within their family situation, children develop coping mechanisms (Don't talk, Don't trust, Don't feel) to survive and deny the shame, guilt, anger, and sadness they may feel inside. These mechanisms then become the basis for their behavior.

What can care-givers do?

For these kids, addiction will become a major influence on their perception of the world and on their knowledge of how to respond to events and feelings. Building in supports for them and teaching effective life skills give hope for the future by preventing the pattern of addiction before it starts. Unless they get help in developing positive living skills and some education about their confusing home life, these patterns of behaviour will follow them into adulthood.

Kids at risk require lessons on positive self image and feelings, decision making and peer pressure, coping skills, alcohol and other drug information, and how to get help.

Messages that kids at risk need

- It is not your fault
- All feelings are ok
- You don't have control over your parents addictions
- It's ok to help yourself